

Recd. M. W. W. W. W.

1508/1184

SERMON

DEFENCE

SUNDAY SCHOOLS.



A

THE PEOPLE OF THESE

SERMON

IN

DEFENCE

OF

Sunday Schools.



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University of Toronto

from the Author

A

Sermon

IN

DEFENCE

OF

SUNDAY SCHOOLS:

In which is shewn

THE PRESENT STATE OF THESE
INSTITUTIONS

IN

Manchester & Salford.

Preached at St. Mary's Church, Manchester, October 22d, and at Trinity Church, Salford, December 3d, 1797;

By C. P. MYDDELTON, A. M.

CURATE OF ST. MARY'S.

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Published at the Request of the Committee.  
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Manchester:

PRINTED BY SOWLER AND RUSSELL, DEANSGATE;

AND SOLD BY I. & W. CLARKE, IN THE
MARKET-PLACE.

1798.



ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following plain and unadorned Discourse having been honoured with the Notice of the Committee of Sunday-Schools in Manchester, the Author has only to observe that, had it been intended for the Press, it should have made its Appearance much sooner; and that he is encouraged to publish it, as requested, with the Hope that it will serve as an Answer to those who, from Prejudice, or a total Unacquaintance with these Institutions, attempt to bring in question their public Utility.

July 24, 1798.

MARK X. 14.

SUFFER LITTLE CHILDREN TO COME UNTO ME,
AND FORBID THEM NOT.

THE first and the most distinguishing Trait in the Character of our blessed Lord, is his *Benevolence*, or *universal Good-will towards Man*. And this is conspicuous in his condescending Behaviour whilst he continued upon the Earth. He went about doing good as his greatest Pleasure. He did not therefore disdain to receive the poorest, or the weakest of his Creatures whenever "they came unto him." If they only desired it, he readily administered to their Necessities, healing every Sickness, and every Disease.—But his divine Compassion was not confined solely to relieving the Distresses of the Body. No: He had the nobler Work of our Salvation in view; his more immediate Concern was to heal the Distempers of the Soul—to enlighten by his saving Instruction the Gloom of Error—to rescue us from the Misery of Sin—and to lead us to consult our truest Happiness in the way of Righteousness.

This proof of his Good-will towards men, superadded to the Miracles which spoke his divine Power, could not but engage the Admiration of those with whom he conversed. Many of them therefore were soon Converts to his Doctrine, and believed that he was in truth a Teacher sent from God.—And amongst those who were possessed with this high Opinion of him, we cannot wonder to find the tender Parent anxious to present his Infant Offspring to Christ—who would not reject them, for he was much displeased with those who would have kept them from him; He embraced them in his Arms; He laid his Hands upon them, and blessed them!

From hence the Church deduces an Argument in favor of the Baptism of Infants: wisely concluding that they cannot be too early initiated into the Service of their God; nor too soon take hold on the glorious Privilege of becoming his Children.

But are we to suppose when they have been thus received into the Congregation of Christ's Flock that nothing further is necessary to keep them so?—Certainly there is something very important on our part, as well as on theirs. Considering the original Depravity of human Nature, and the great Danger they are entering upon in this Scene of Trial, we cannot leave them, like the young of the Ostrich*, forsaken and defence-

* Job xxxix. 14, 15.



less; left so far from their Being the Children of Christ, they become the Children of the Devil! The Church has therefore enjoined that Children be taught, *so soon as they are able to learn*, the Nature of that Covenant which they entered into at their Baptism; and all other Things which a Christian ought to know and believe *to his Soul's Health*.

This, I am persuaded, all of you who are Parents, and who are capable of affording your Children any sort of Education, must allow to be a very important Consideration.—But here are before you those whose humble Lot in Life does not admit of the like Opportunity of coming to the Knowledge of their Duty. And will not the same Argument for the Necessity of a Christian Education hold good in respect to them? Or are they to be considered as a distinct class of Beings, and in no way related to us? And is then their Poverty to be imputed to them as their crime?—Such, perhaps, may be the Opinion of those whom the Pride of this World may have led to forget the Reason why Providence has permitted so wide a Difference in the Estates of men; but you who consider this Inequality as wisely intended for the Exercise of our several Virtues in a State of Trial, will rather look upon their helpless Condition as the greater Occasion of your charitable assistance. You will regard them with the feelings of Christians—you

will consider them as Children of the same Father—baptized into the same Baptism—and called to the same Hope with yourselves. You will therefore “suffer them to come unto Christ, and forbid them not.”

Now, I would ask, how can this be done more effectually than by endeavouring to propagate Christian Knowledge amongst the lower Orders of Mankind? Amongst the ruder Nations abroad, upon whose darkened Minds the Light of Revelation has not yet shone, we have judged it expedient to attempt this; and shall we, to whom the Church of Christ is here open, and who have the Gospel in our Hands, be less active in enlightening the most ignorant of our own Land, those who are more immediately under our Observation? No: The general Sense of the Kingdom has told us to the contrary: but in nothing so plainly as in the Ardor which it has manifested for the Establishment of Sunday Schools.

And that it was expedient thus to divide Light from Darkness is evident both from Reason and from Scripture. We know that the first Act of God at the Creation of the *Natural-World* was to *give Light to it*: and good he said it was so to do. So, in respect to the *moral*, or *intellectual* World, we should be careful to spread abroad that Light which comes to us from Heaven; we should be zealous to propagate a true Spirit of Devotion and Piety amongst Mankind. Then it is, when Reli-

gious Instruction dawns upon the Chaos of the Mind, when the Mists of Superstition and Error are made to vanish as the Demons of retiring Darkness, that we see clearly "to come unto Christ." Then it is that he is "as a Lanthorn to our feet and a light unto our Paths." We behold him "as the Day-Star that hath visited and redeemed his people." We feel him "as the Sun of Righteousness arising with Healing in his Wings;" for the Healing of the Nations, that the poor may have the Gospel preached unto them, and that all flesh may see the Salvation of their God!

When Sunday Schools were first set on foot it was doubted by some whether the Children would learn any thing by so little Opportunity—But Experience has now given ample Testimony to the contrary. If we are willing to be convinced, let us visit these Children, and we shall be astonished at the Improvement which many of them have made: We shall find some who never had any other Instruction than what they have received by these means, are now in the Office of Teachers.

We must make a due Allowance for their different Capacities: but supposing their Progress ever so slow, should *the Chance of their making some Progress* therefore be taken from them? Can any man seriously think this who recollects that in the early part of his Life he has been in a similar Situation with these Children, and that his learning

was *progressive*?—He must doubtless esteem it a great Happiness that he can now read: He cannot but be thankful that he had Parents and Instructors so watchful for his good as to direct and improve his Understanding when he was in the State of helpless Infancy. And can he be really sensible of so great a Blessing, and not at the same time indulge the charitable Desire that others of his fellow-creatures should reap a like Advantage?

When it is considered that we live in a free Land, where the Scriptures are open to us in our Native-Tongue, and that they are required to be read by every one who lives to take upon himself his Baptismal-Vow, is it not, I will not say a want of Charity, but a degree of Cruelty to the poor to deprive them of an Opportunity of learning to read? Certainly, as much so as it would be “to forbid” those reading them who are already able. You will, doubtless, admit that the Scriptures speak to us on the Necessity of early Instruction: that they point out to us some such way of bringing Children to Christ when they admonish us “to train up a Child *in the way he should go*”—“to bring him up in the Nurture and Admonition of the Lord”—in the Consideration that “when he is old he will not depart from it.”—

And while the Evening of Life advances great is the Consolation to those who can read the Scriptures. Whoever has been accustomed to visit a sick-bed can say how much the aged and

infirm poor have been grieved to think that they never had an Opportunity of receiving a little Instruction in reading; that when their Complaints disabled them from working, they might have devoted their time to reading their Bibles, and such other Books as would have pointed out to them the way of their Salvation.—Who then, who that has any Sensibility, any pretension to Christian-feeling, would wish to withhold from them such a Resource of real Comfort?—Surely in vain shall that man profess his love to God who could thus forget the Love which he owes to his Neighbour!

But notwithstanding these obvious Reasons for the Necessity of Sunday Schools, there are, I am sorry to say, those who by their objections would seem “to forbid these Children” to be thus brought to the Knowledge of Christ. They either have not, or will not consider the Benefits arising from them. They argue from the Instances of Youthful Profligacy still observable in our Streets, that these Institutions are of little Use. As well might they pretend to doubt the Advantage of other Public Institutions which have been designed for the good of the poor, because they do not see that *all* those for whom they were intended are likely to be the better for them.—There are, it is true, many Instances of the Prevalence of Vice amongst the Families of the poor; and the reason, no doubt, is because many Children are neglected; or because Ignorance and Vice are too nearly con-

ned with each other!—This therefore, is no Argument against the Establishment of Sunday Schools, but rather in favor of them. Before it can be turned against them it must be made appear that the Children who do attend them are no way improved.—But the contrary is self evident, from the Circumstance of their having been now for a long time so generally encouraged.—To say nothing of those in other parts of the Kingdom, let us briefly consider the State of our own—

We find it now thirteen years since Sunday Schools were opened in Manchester and Salford. The Plan upon which they were proposed to be conducted was the most likely which could have been adopted to meet the Approbation of the Subscribers in general. It was meant to be as extensively useful as possible, those who dissent from us in their ~~Mode of Worship~~ were therefore invited to unite in so noble a work of Charity. From that time it became a common Concern; and it has been regularly attended to, and promoted by one Improvement after another, so as justly to entitle it to the Support of its present numerous Friends—The Town was at first divided into five Districts; to which three others have since been added: Dissenters were chosen joint Trustees; and, besides the general Visitors, every School has had its particular Visitor. It was also determined so long ago as the Year 1788 that the *Ladies* should be requested to visit these Schools,

as is the Custom at Bath, and in other places where they have been successfully carried on. This however has not been so generally attended to as was expected. The present Committee, therefore, convinced of the Propriety of the Measure, have lately brought the matter forward again, in the Hope that they shall be able to appoint *annually* one, or more Lady-Visitors for every School in each District: conceiving at the same time that when the Novelty of the measure ceases, and its Advantages are duly considered, there are in every Christian Congregation many whose good Sense and Piety will lead them to take a pleasure in being thus useful in promoting the good of others*.

But what we must consider as conducing most of all to the proper Management of this Establishment is the appointment of a *separate Committee*, which has continued to meet regularly once a Month. The Fidelity of the Gentlemen who thus give their Attention to the Interest of these Schools, affords to the public in general an Opportunity of stating their Sentiments from time to time respect-

* At the two Schools in St. Mary's District, three Ladies attend in Monthly Rotation. They continue with the Children the whole of the Afternoon, and are particularly desirous to make them understand what they read, and take care that some of them are brought regularly to Church one part of the day—unless the Weather prevent them.—These can therefore speak from their own Observation how much the Children are benefitted by the Attendance of Female-Visitors.

ing the Progress of them; so that if any thing can be proposed which is likely to be of further Improvement, it will be adopted: and, that the Committee may not fail to be acquainted with any thing that is going on wrong, a Monthly Account is now regularly brought to them of the Attendance of the Visitors, Teachers and Scholars: and once a Year a particular Examination is made of the general State of each School, and a Register appointed for this express purpose.

To a Plan so well digested, and so warmly entered into, one should imagine no serious Objection would be made—Some over-scrupulous, but well-meaning people, indeed, who admit its Utility in the evident Alteration it has made in the Manners of the poor, have, nevertheless, doubted whether their being *taught to read* on the Sabbath-day is not a Breach of the fourth Commandment. But let it be remembered that the Intention of these Institutions is not that they should be taught to read *as a Science*, but only with a view to *religious Improvement* so far as to enable them to come to a Knowledge of their Duty: which, as they have *no other* Opportunity, must be considered, certainly, as much a *Work of Necessity, in regard to the Health of the Soul*, as any Work of healing performed upon the Body and allowable on the Sabbath-day*.

* Whatever relates only to this World, or which has not a direct Tendency to their religious Duties, we grant, cannot

There are others, we are sorry to see, who have conceived an unaccountable prejudice against these Establishments. We do not know, however, that they have yet given us any good Reason for their Opposition. With respect to such Reasons as they have *hastily* advanced, the best, and the properest way of answering them is to refer them to the Consideration of the Committee. If they will not bear the Test of *their* Examination, surely they are not worth *our* attending to.

In short, we may find fault and object till the Opportunity of doing good is lost to us. But if we are in earnest in the Cause of Religion and Virtue, we shall be cautious how we start unnecessary Objections, which may prejudice weak Minds; who are apt to catch at any thing which has the appearance only of being plausible; especially if it can be pleaded in Excuse for with-holding their Charity!

with Decency be taught on the Lord's-day; when therefore Application has been made for any Children belonging to the Sunday Schools in Manchester or Salford *to be taught to write*, the Committee have given an Order that it should be on *Wednesdays*, not on Sunday Evenings.—From which it will not be supposed that they would permit *any secular* learning, such as *Accounts*, to be taught on *Sundays*; an Irregularity which is not only tolerated, but publicly * defended in some of the Schools in the Neighbourhood of Manchester.

* See the Letters of Mr. J. Mayer, of Stockport.

It was the Opinion of our late Diocesan*, when he gave us his Thoughts respecting the Establishment of Sunday-Schools in this Town, that they were "one of the most probable means of diffusing Sentiments of Virtue and Religion amongst the common people: and more especially necessary in populous manufacturing Towns, like this; where the Children are during the Week-days generally employed in work, and on Sundays are but too apt to be idle, mischievous, and vicious."

Much has been said, within your own Knowledge, about the Neglect of the Sabbath in this Town and Neighbourhood. With regard to the lower Class of people, the Cause has been generally attributed to their having been entirely destitute of every moral and religious Instruction; as well as to the Prevalence of Example. It is observed that they have not been *accustomed to attend* any place of Worship, because their Parents, as illiterate probably as themselves, are seldom seen to attend any. Hence (says another sensible Writer) "they have been led to consider the Sabbath as a Day of Rest and Pastime. And it would be well if they spent it in nothing worse. But alas! it is too commonly wasted in wanton Levity and thoughtless Dissipation. Being excused at this time from Works of Labor, they think them-

* The present Bishop of London.

selves at Liberty to be *licentious* as well as idle."— It has therefore been a sufficient Inducement to several persons, of good Discernment, to encourage these Schools, that by such means the Children of the poor may be regularly brought to Church, and that the Sabbath may be spent *innocently* at least, instead of being perverted to unworthy and wicked purposes.

The Clergy of Manchester, you have seen, have many of them stepped forward to notice in the most public manner the Profanation of the Sabbath: for this they have met with some Abuse from those who are pleased when their good is evil spoken of; and who are apt to judge more uncharitably of their Actions than they usually judge of other men's—But the Clergy will not be discouraged *so long as they can solace themselves with the Hope that the good and the virtuous co-operate with them in their Endeavours for the Advancement of Morality and Religion!*—If they should give up the Contest because of the Opposition they meet with, (Opposition too without Argument!) by the same Rule both Religion and the Laws might be set aside, since there will always be some to declaim against and resist them. No: they consider that the same Providence "who permits the Attacks of Infidelity in order to give the greater Evidence to the Truth it opposes," has also ordained that our Virtue, to be known and approved, must first be tried; and that consequently

the Merit of the good we do is considerably enhanced by the Difficulty or Temptation there is to the contrary.—However therefore some may think to forbid us thus to bring young Children to the Knowledge of God and their Redeemer, let us not be weary in well-doing. Let it be a sufficient Encouragement to our Labor that it is not in vain in the Lord!

Already has he shewed us plainly that he takes a Delight in giving his Blessing to the Works of Charity. He has been pleased to prosper, even beyond our Expectations, our Exertions to promote these Schools: that (as hath been observed) “we are now able to reject as groundless and imaginary the Inconveniences or Mischiefs which may have been hastily supposed to arise from them; and to appeal to positive Experience for their public Utility.” We have to congratulate ourselves that there are now *thirty-six* Schools in Manchester and Salford, in which upwards of five thousand Boys and Girls are instructed, we assert, to the evident Improvement of the greatest part of them in Religious Learning, and good Behaviour. And from the annual Reports we find that they are increasing * considerably every year;—which, I have no doubt, will be a Consideration with you for the further Extension of your Liberality towards them!

* The Increase of Scholars in the last year is 808.

It has been said that the Manners of the lower Order of the People *here* are much less cultivated than the Manners of those in other parts of the Kingdom; and that many of them do not even manifest an Acquaintance with common Civility. I do not mean the *Children* only of the poor, but *their Parents* likewise.—But if you expect from them greater Propriety of Behaviour, you will admit the Necessity of contributing in some way to their Improvement.—Now reflect for a moment, what must be the Consequence if these Schools should cease to be encouraged, and so many Children left to follow their own Inclinations on the Sabbath-day? Before such an Establishment was recommended to your notice, can any of you say that you recollect the poor as regular in their Attendance in the Lord's House as you now see them? And if they did not then shew the like Attention to their Duty to God, should we hope from them any Attention to Decency in their Conduct towards Man?—Where should they learn it?—From their Parents?—“ Alas ! (it is well said) the Circumstances of Birth and mere Subsistence are often the only ones for which many of them are indebted to their Parents. If the Parent takes no pains to cultivate the minds of his Children; if he explains to them no single Instance of their Duty to him, to God, or to themselves; if he scarcely provides them with Clothes and Food sufficient for their Defence against the Inclemencies

of Cold and Hunger; and if he aggravates all these Circumstances by his Caprice, Ill-humour, or Profligacy, on what Foundation, I beg to know, must the Duties of his Children be built? From what Dictates of Nature, Reason, or common Sense must they learn to pay filial Honor to such a Parent? If his Example inspire them with respect for any thing, it must be for his Follies and his Crimes. How then should Love and Gratitude towards him, or Decency towards others, take place in that House which is so unfriendly to every Virtue?" And how should those Children honor God whom their Parents daily dishonor?

This, I say, is a true Picture of the present Condition of many Families of the poor.

There are too amongst them many honest industrious Parents, who with their utmost Exertions are not able to pay for the Instruction of a numerous Family. They think it well if they can procure for them their weekly Support, but especially when Sickness or any other untoward Accident adds to the Difficulties they have to struggle with. Shall we then let slip the blessed Opportunity of being "as Fathers to the poor?" Shall we not stand in the place of those Parents who want the Power, or Inclination to bring their Children to Christ by a virtuous and religious Education?

The poor are seemingly born to greater Misery than yourselves: O! manifest that you have a

fellow-feeling for distressed Humanity—that you delight to be instrumental in softening the Sorrows of Life!—You see, from Experience, how rank and wild their minds are in a state of Ignorance: admit then the Necessity of cultivating and improving them!—You see that Nature unsubdued is the constant Slave of Passion: contribute what is in your power to bring it under the Dominion of Reason!—You see that those who are untaught the Duties of Life cannot be supposed to observe them: O! teach them to act suitably to the various Relations in which they are placed!—Give them, above all, that Knowledge which alone can be of essential Use to them. Let the Light of the Gospel so shine, that it may dispel those Clouds which conceal from them their God and their Redeemer.—Yes:—“ Suffer them to come unto Him, and forbid them not!”

And what, think ye, must be the Joy of a *fond Parent*, to view in his beloved Offspring the Buds of early Virtue expanding their fair Bosoms to the happy Influence of religious Instruction? Surely he will have cause to bless you who are the means of contributing so much to his Comfort!—And how great must be the Gratitude and Affection of these yet-unthinking *Children*, who are so fortunate as to be trained up in the way their ripen years will most approve and delight in? They will revere the Memory of their Friends and Benefactors!—Think likewise what Benefits the Com-

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munity at large will derive from your Bounty on this Occasion. *Your Country* too will bless you, assured that nothing can contribute more to its well-being than the Instruction of Youth in the principles of true Religion and Virtue—And what must be *your own feelings* upon the Consciousness of your having so far endeavoured well?—You will be happy in the Thought—Not merely that you have done some good to your fellow-creatures—You will have the superior Gratification of having pleased God, who sent you into the World to do his Will: the doing which, indeed, is all our Happiness, and all our Praise!

But this we shall feel and understand more perfectly in that other Life whither our Works are to follow us; and to which, we are taught, our Reward is to be exactly proportioned: where the malicious and unrighteous Man shall think with Sorrow how much Evil and Misery he has been the Cause of to his fellow-creatures—but where doubly sweet must be the Recollection of the charitable and the humane, that they have not neglected the Opportunity of making others happy in this Life; that they have snatched them with an Angel's hand from Folly and from Vice, and led them to secure that Happiness which is only to be found in those unclouded Regions, where they that turn many to Righteousness shall shine as the Stars for evermore! *Amen!*



